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ICE ARRESTS 582 VIOLENT GANG MEMBERS AND ASSOCIATES IN TWO-WEEK NATIONWIDE ENFORCEMENT OPERATION LA-area accounts for 26 of latest arrests in “Community Shield” gang enforcement initiative

LOS ANGELES – Twenty-six foreign nationals with ties to violent street gangs in the Los Angeles area are among the 582 persons arrested nationwide during the past two weeks as part of an expansion of “Operation Community Shield,” an ongoing anti-gang initiative led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The expansion of “Operation Community Shield,” was announced today by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, and Marcy Forman, Director of Investigation for ICE, at a news conference in Washington, D.C. These latest efforts bring the total number of arrests since the Operation began to more than 1,050.

From July 16 to July 28, ICE offices throughout the United States teamed up with federal, state and local law enforcement partners to target members of more than 54 violent street gangs, including Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), Sureños, 18th Street Gang, Latin Kings, Vatos Locos, Mexican Mafia, La Raza gang, Border Brothers, Brown Pride, Norteno, Florencia 13, Tiny Rascal, Asian Boyz, Jamaican Posse, and numerous other violent street gangs.

The 582 gang members and associates, including 11 gang leaders, arrested in this two-week operation are accused of various criminal violations and/or administrative immigration violations. In total, 76 of these individuals have been charged with criminal violations that range from illegally re-entering the United States after deportation; to being alien in possession of a firearm; to possession of fraudulent documents or various state crimes.

The vast majority of the gang members and associates, 506, were arrested on administrative immigration charges, ranging from being a convicted felon foreign national subject to removal; to entering the country without inspection; to violating the terms of a visa. Of these individuals, 261 are foreign nationals who have prior criminal convictions, rendering them subject to removal from the United States.

“Street gangs in America have grown and expanded their influence to an alarming level, marked by increased violence and criminal activity,” said Secretary Chertoff. “These gangs pose a severe threat to public safety and this growth must not go unchallenged. We will continue to coordinate our efforts closely with our law enforcement partners nationally and use our collective authorities to help rid our communities of this malignancy.”

In the Southland, six of the 26 gang members arrested during this latest operation are facing felony charges for re-entering the United States after a deportation. The remaining 20 foreign nationals have been placed in formal immigration removal proceedings. Three have already been deported from the United States.

As part of the effort, ICE agents conducted operations in Los Angeles and several surrounding communities, including Long Beach, Glendale, Gardena, and Bellflower. In addition, three subjects were taken into custody by ICE upon their release from California Department of Corrections facilities in San Bernardino County. Those placed under arrest include foreign nationals from five countries – Mexico (17), Guatemala (4), El Salvador (2), Armenia (2), and Laos (1). The two Armenians are members of a gang known as Armenian Power. Both have prior criminal convictions for drug violations.

“We have a message for the violent street gang members in America: ‘stopping your violence and criminal activities is high on our list of ICE’s priorities,’” said Loraine Brown, special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in Los Angeles. “And we’re backing up our resolve with results, here in Los Angeles and around the country.”

This initiative harnessed the work of 40 ICE offices and more than 84 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. This operation employed 384 ICE agents and officers, 247 state and local officers and 92 agents from the DEA, ATF and FBI.

The arrests during the past two weeks are the latest enforcement action under Operation Community Shield, a nationwide ICE anti-gang initiative intended to disrupt, dismantle, and assist in the criminal prosecution of violent gangs by employing the full range of authorities available to ICE.

ICE uses its broad immigration authorities (both criminal and administrative) against gang members, as well as its customs authorities in targeting gang-related narcotics smuggling, money laundering, and in seeking the forfeiture of illegally derived assets.

Operation Community Shield involves strong partnerships and cooperation with existing federal, state, and local anti-gang efforts. Such partnerships are essential to the success of the initiative and to ensure officer safety during operations. ICE uses intelligence on gang organizations and leadership provided by state and local authorities. This information is then used whenever possible to arrest, prosecute, and/or deport individual gang members.

Operation Community Shield also has an important foreign component, coordinating efforts through ICE’s Attaché offices abroad, particularly with those governments that are also experiencing gang problems. To date, ICE has participated in several anti-gang law enforcement summits and conferences throughout Central America to better coordinate anti-gang related efforts.

The initial target of Operation Community Shield was MS-13, which is one of the largest and most violent street gangs in the country. In February, ICE kicked off the initiative with agents in six major U.S. cities conducting a coordinated enforcement operation that resulted in the arrest of 103 members of MS-13. In the months that followed, ICE agents throughout the country joined ranks and continued targeting MS-13 members in their jurisdictions.

In May 2005, ICE expanded Operation Community Shield to include all criminal street gangs and prison gangs with foreign-born members. With the launch of this second phase, ICE’s Operation Community Shield aims to ensure that gang members have no safe haven in our nation’s communities.